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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0525
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 3569
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 1387
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1254
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 1823
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2371
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS ASHGABAT 000402

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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STATE FOR SCA/CEN, DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVIST SAYS HER
OPEN LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT ACHIEVED NOTHING

REF: ASHGABAT 0326

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) PolOff recently met with civil society activist Natalya Anurova-Shabunts, the co-director of a center that assists the disabled in Ashgabat. She was the author of a lengthy but well-thought-out letter sent to President Berdimuhamedov in February criticizing the government for its failure to reform in a number of social and economic sectors (Reftel).

13. (SBU) Shabunts indicated that since her letter was widely posted on the Internet at the end of February, she has not been harassed or threatened in any way. But she said the biggest disappointment of the entire exercise was the fact that, after dozens of calls from supporters around the world and offers of financial assistance, Turkmenistan's government has been completely silent. Further, although she had specifically petitioned the president's assistance in helping overcome local government barriers and cultural biases that had prevented the center from being established in a new location, the government at all levels has done nothing. She believes that President Berdimuhamedov did not see the letter, and asked that post try to pass it directly to the president if possible.

14. (SBU) COMMENT: It is a sign of progress that the Turkmen author of such a critical letter, citing the details of the government's socio-economic failures, is not suffering blowback from the letter's publication. Disappointing as it might be that the president did not respond to Shabunts' letter, however, it might have been unrealistic to expect a formal response from that level. We will continue to stay in contact with Shabunts to monitor her and her center's progress. END COMMENT.
HOAGLAND